

Tapping Potential

Putting ideas into action

By Makiko Tachimori (Fukui)

On June 1, 2016, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Women in Business Committee (WIB) published the white paper *Untapped Potential: A Collaborative Blueprint for Achieving Japan's 2020/30 Overall Target of Women Holding 30 Percent of Management and Leadership Positions by 2020*. The document outlines 10 recommendations for helping businesses achieve this lofty-but-imperative target that will bring more women into the workforce, open leadership positions to them, and create an environment of equality.

The Japanese government is aiming to enact a bill regarding work-style reform this fall. That there is a push for such change indicates great progress, and we hope this will have a positive impact on the efforts to increase the number of women managers and leaders and achieve the goal of having 30 percent of leadership positions filled by women by 2020. This is basically a bottom-up

reform; there is not much talk about top-down reform to increase the number of women leaders.

Even in the United States, there are only 32 women holding CEO posts among Fortune 500 companies. Women who aspire to the C-suite face far more resistance than they expect.¹

Another study has documented the sizable gender gap in funding Silicon Valley start-ups. In 2016, male entrepreneurs received \$58.2 billion in start-up capital, while women entrepreneurs took in just \$1.5 billion—a mere 2.5% of all funds. These studies have shown that there is much unconscious bias toward women who aspire to leadership roles.

As an executive recruiter specializing in introducing women executives, I still sometimes hear backlash from companies. This includes comments such as, “This particular position is not suitable for women.” What a huge waste of an opportunity to acquire talent! Over the past 10 years, I have seen hundreds of women who could have taken on the C-suite role. We can’t keep wasting this talent. We must overcome these biases.

In our white paper, we made 10 recommendations to help turn the tide. This year, we will expand upon these in *The ACCJ Journal* by interviewing professionals and experts in each field. Through these conversations, we will gain greater insight into what needs to be done next to move us closer to the goal. Starting with the October issue, we will present a series of 10 interviews—one for each recommendation. We invite each of you to take these ideas and put them into action in your field.

The Women in Business Committee also has many monthly events covering themes based on our recommendations, and we welcome all nationalities—and both women and men—to our events. On October 17, we will hold the fifth Women in Business Summit in Tokyo, and invite everyone to attend. Our mission is to keep our momentum going and never give up. We hope you’ll join us! ■

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THE 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Working hours reform
- 2 Male champions of change
- 3 *Ikumen* (fathers participating in childrearing)
- 4 Greater transparency about women in leadership roles
- 5 A new type of lab
- 6 Tax incentives
- 7 Seniors as before- and afterschool childcare providers
- 8 Domestic helpers
- 9 HR-led talent management and training
- 10 Employee assistance programs/ concierge services

1. Susan Chira, “Why Women Aren’t C.E.O.s, According to Women Who Almost Were,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 2017.

